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SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT AND REPORTING DIVISION

ANALYSIS OF
SCHOOL JURISDICTION
1999-2000

ANNUAL EDUCATION
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This document is intended primarily for:

System and School Administrators
The Minister of Alberta Learning
The Standing Policy Committee on Learning and Employment
Alberta Learning Executive Team and Managers

And may be of interest to:

Teachers
Parents
Education Stakeholders
Community Members


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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary.....	1
Introduction.....	2
Provincial and Board Priority Areas.....	3
Conclusions.....	9
Results Achieved and Implications for Continuous Improvement.....	10
Implications for Provincial Planning and Reporting.....	11
Conclusions.....	18
Progress and Achievements of Specific Groups of Students.....	20
Financial Summary.....	22
Next Steps.....	23

List of Tables:

Table 1.....	3
Table 2.....	4
Table 3.....	5
Table 4.....	6
Table 5.....	7
Table 6.....	8
Table 7.....	8
Table 8.....	10
Table 9.....	11
Table 10.....	12
Table 11.....	14
Table 12.....	15
Table 13.....	16
Table 14.....	17
Table 15.....	18
Table 16.....	20
Table 17.....	21
Table 18.....	22



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This summary analysis of the school jurisdiction Annual Education Results Reports (AERRs) reflects considerable effort over the past several years by Alberta educators to improve accountability in our education system. The reports provide an opportunity for government and school jurisdictions to work together in identifying the strengths and challenges that exist in the Alberta basic education system. Jurisdiction results are related to provincial and local goals and strategies for improving education for students. The information provided by these reports will help inform the next cycle of strategic planning by Alberta Learning and its stakeholders. The key findings from the Annual Education Results Reports are as follows:

- The five provincial priorities for basic education have been a required component of school jurisdiction planning and reporting since 1995-96. A careful and complete review of these priority areas would help ensure that the accountability measures are focused on the appropriate key areas.
- Alberta Learning should consider how the emerging board priorities, including literacy development for students, and teachers' professional development are addressed in future Alberta Learning business plans.
- Among the different priorities identified by school jurisdictions, the issue of funding has fluctuated significantly in the past few years. In 1997-98 school jurisdictions ranked funding as a high priority, in 1998-99 as a low priority and in 1999-2000 as a high priority again. This variability does not coincide with changes in other indicators reported by school boards, which suggests local factors are influencing perceptions of funding issues. Alberta Learning should consider in its Review Committee on Outcomes and the review of the funding framework for basic education the issues identified by school boards. The Ministry may also want to explore ways to better link provincial decisions about funding programs and levels to a set of input, process and outcome measures. The province may also want to seek ways to better communicate education funding information to both school boards and the general public.
- School board AERRs indicate areas that could benefit from further attention. These areas include increasing program flexibility, improving communications around student evaluation and assessment, and providing additional program or financial supports for rural and small schools.
- Program implementation is one of the more challenging areas for school boards. Alberta Learning's business planning process may need to consider the program or curricular issues identified in this analysis.
- Both school boards and Alberta Learning have identified the need to improve public satisfaction as a priority area. A collaborative approach to public communication should be explored.
- School boards continue to experience difficulties in reporting results for specific groups of students (ELI, ESL, and Special Education). Alberta Learning should address this need in the work already underway with the Special Education Review Implementation Team and the group reviewing the structure of the Student Information System.
- Where necessary, Field Services should continue to work closely with school jurisdiction staff to ensure the AERR accurately presents the jurisdiction's financial summary data.

INTRODUCTION

School jurisdiction Annual Education Results Reports (AERRs) are reviewed and analyzed as a means to support three key purposes of accountability for basic education:

- 1) Provide succinct reporting to government and the public about the strengths and challenges in the basic education system.
- 2) Support continuous improvement of the Alberta education system.
- 3) Align Ministry and jurisdiction planning and reporting.

The evaluation and reporting efforts of school jurisdictions are confirmed through a valuable dialogue between the Field Services Branch and school jurisdiction central office administrators. Out of this dialogue, the content, conclusions and themes detailed within this report are verified.

The 1999-2000 AERRs represent the end to reporting for most school boards on the original goal structures that began in 1996. In some ways, this report represents the end of an era – the first phase of accountability implementation of the 1995 Government Accountability Act. This report is the fourth in a series of AERR reviews.

PROVINCIAL AND BOARD PRIORITY AREAS

The provincial government identified five priority areas for basic education in 1997-1998. The patterns of the School Board reporting of progress and accomplishments regarding these priorities and initiatives for 1997-1998 to 1999-2000 are noted in Table 1. 'Percent Reported' represents the percent of school boards that complied with this reporting requirement. The 'N Implications for Planning' represents the number of specific implications identified on the summary and review forms relative to the priority area. Some boards may have identified more than one implication.

Table 1 – Provincial Priorities (n = 60 Jurisdictions)

Priority Area	Percent Reported			N Implications for Planning
	1997-98	1998-99	1999-00	
High School Completion	78%	57%	87%	53
Secondary Math	73%	58%	82%	50
Coordination of Services	75%	75%	86%	42
Access to Technology	78%	75%	86%	56
Public Satisfaction	N/A	62%	66%	15
Board Identified Priorities	58%	28%	68%	71

The implications are given further consideration in the following sections of this report. School board reporting of provincial and local priorities was reviewed relative to implications the jurisdiction had identified for provincial planning. These implications were content analyzed and categorized and frequencies tallied. The results of the content analysis for each priority area are summarized below.

HIGH SCHOOL COMPLETION

Eighty-seven percent of the AERRs¹ included discussion of the secondary High School Completion priority and of these, 35 jurisdictions or 58% identified specific implications of the jurisdictions' work in improving the high school completion rate for provincial planning. These implications are summarized by order of frequency in Table 2.

Table 2 – Improving High School Completion - Implications for Provincial Planning

Category	N	Summary of Suggested Implications
Tracking data*	22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alberta Learning needs to provide jurisdiction level completion rate data and comparative provincial statistics
	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide data on completion rates for Aboriginal students
	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider completion rate data on basis of 3 or 4 years after entry to grade 10 versus 6 years after entry to grade 9.
Program supports	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase program flexibility for students
	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use AISI dollars to increase programs and modes of delivery
	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use information technology to expand program choice and flexibility
	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the funding support for Outreach programs
	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bolster efforts to attract CTS teachers
Student supports	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasize career development through appropriate career counseling and portfolio development
	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage greater responsiveness to students' needs
	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review funding for students over 19 years of age
	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus supports on Aboriginal students
	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support community linkages to enhance program relevance
Total	53	

*Note: Jurisdiction high school completion rates are now being provided by Alberta Learning to school boards on the basis of completion five years after entering grade 10. Provincial rates have been reported in the Alberta Learning Annual Report for a number of years.

¹ Premised on the expected 60 AERRs for the 1999-2000 reporting year.

SECONDARY MATHEMATICS

Eighty-two percent of the AERRs included discussion of the secondary math priority and of these, 25 jurisdictions or 42% identified specific implications of the jurisdictions' work in secondary math for provincial planning. These implications are summarized by order of frequency in Table 3.

Table 3 – Secondary Math Implications for Provincial Planning

Category	N	Summary of Suggested Implications
Curriculum design	9	• Clarify acceptability of Applied/ Pure Math in post-secondary
	5	• Applied math not perceived to be appropriate to “middle level students.
	2	• Introduce math streaming in grade 9
	2	• Focus intervention strategies on junior high math
	1	• Integrate ICT into math curriculum
In-service education	5	• Provide PD dollars directly to jurisdictions
	4	• Continue PD support to Consortia
	2	• Provide in-service on meeting diverse learning needs of students.
	1	• Lead teacher concept does not work well
Preservice education	5	• Increase supply of math/ science teachers via incentives
	3	• Improve math teacher qualifications
	2	• Require math courses for all teachers
Instructional supports	3	• Provide technology and curriculum supports
	2	• Providing additional student supports is costly
	1	• Maintain curriculum updates electronically
	1	• Increase AISI dollars to increase/ diversify program delivery
Students	1	• Math results are negatively affecting student scholarship qualifications
Total	49	

SERVICES FOR CHILDREN

Eighty-seven percent of the AERRs included discussion of the services for children priority and of these, 26 jurisdictions or 43% identified specific implications of the jurisdictions' work in coordinating services for children for provincial planning. These implications are summarized by order of frequency in Table 4.

Table 4 – Services for Children Implications for Provincial Planning

Category	N	Summary of Suggested Implications
Administrative structures/processes	17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen and simplify inter-agency cooperation processes or boundaries.
	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow additional administrative funding
	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allocate student health initiative dollars or increase funding support for family-school liaison workers
	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding should follow treaty students resident on reserves and attending provincial schools
	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simplify overall funding model
Outcomes	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Results have been good or excellent – partnerships working well
Staff	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Problems with availability of specialized staff, i.e. speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists and physical therapists.
	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More support for mental health specialists required
Early Intervention	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Target resources on children much earlier and integrate with ECS program
Facilities	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many schools lack workspace for coordination and specialist work with students.
Total	42	

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Eighty-seven percent of the AERRs included discussion of the improving access to information technology priority and of these, 33 jurisdictions or 55% identified specific implications of the jurisdictions' work with information technology for provincial planning. These implications are summarized by order of frequency in Table 5.

Table 5 – Information Technology - Implications for Provincial Planning

Category	N	Summary of Suggested Implications
Funding	17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High costs of implementing and maintaining computers, wide area networks and technical support point to the on-going “evergreen” needs for this priority area
	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Costs can be relatively higher for rural jurisdictions, hence the need for funding equity for IT supports.
	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boards that exercised leadership and already invested in WAN's should be compensated
Outcomes	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technology is having positive impacts on student learning through improving student: computer ratios and ICT curriculum
	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive IT partnerships/ implementing action research teams
	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telus 2 Learn resource appreciated
	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementing ICT through action research
Infrastructure	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appreciate Supernet, but need details regarding implementation plan
	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High speed Internet needed at schools and for home ed. students.
Staff	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-service needs continue to be a priority
Curriculum	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need tools to evaluate effectiveness of ICT outcomes
	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to incorporate ICT into new curriculum and Program of Studies.
Total	56	

IMPROVING PUBLIC SATISFACTION

Sixty-seven percent of the AERRs included discussion of the improving public satisfaction with education priority and of these, 13 jurisdictions or 22% identified specific implications of the jurisdictions work with improving public satisfaction for provincial planning. These implications are summarized by order of frequency in Table 6.

Table 6 – Improving Public Satisfaction - Implications for Provincial Planning

Category	N	Summary of Suggested Implications
Communications plan	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide more information about student achievement, curriculum changes and current issues to the public through news releases, radio and TV advertisements and other means
	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage elected officials to speak more often and positively about schools
Pre-requisites	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More resources are needed to increase public satisfaction
	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement all special education review recommendations
	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure an adequate supply of qualified teachers
Total	15	

LOCAL PRIORITIES

AERRs were given careful consideration regarding local board priorities where these priorities held specific implications for provincial planning. Board priorities that duplicated the provincial priorities are not included nor are board priorities that were highly general or unique to the type of authority; e.g. “improve student achievement” or “strengthen Catholicity”, etc. Lastly, a priority had to be represented in 3 or more boards to be included. A summary of the content analysis of jurisdiction priorities is detailed in Table 7.

Table 7 – Local Priorities - Implications for Provincial Planning

Category	N	Implication
Communications	17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance local communications, improve jurisdiction profile in the community, build partnerships and improve public support/ satisfaction
Students/ Program	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasize literacy development
	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on readiness to learn and preschool readiness skills
	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve achievement of special needs and disadvantaged student outcomes
	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance student conduct, safety and well-being
Staff	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance teacher evaluation policy implementation, staff development, innovation and collaboration
	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership development
	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher technology skill development and integration
	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher recruitment and retention
Funding	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide for more flexibility and equity in funding structures within the jurisdiction and address O&M cost pressures and CEU administrative pressures.
Total	71	

CONCLUSIONS

School board reporting on the five provincial priorities improved substantially in 1999-2000. The priority of public satisfaction is one area that continues to need the most work.

Two-thirds of school boards report local priorities in their AERRs and these local priorities hold substantive implications for provincial planning. These patterns suggest a continuing maturation of the two-way reporting relationships between Alberta Learning and school boards.

The five provincial priorities for basic education were explored through meetings between Field Services and school jurisdiction central office administrators to pinpoint key implications for provincial planning. From the perspectives of senior administrators in the field, then, it is important that Alberta Learning's planning consider the following potential actions:

- Improving High School Completion
 - Provide high school completion rate data and provincial statistics to jurisdictions (note: this action has been achieved).
 - Support initiatives that increase program flexibility for students through technology, AISI funding and other means.
 - Support initiatives that improve career counseling and career planning for students.
- Secondary Mathematics
 - Expedite resolution of the outstanding issues associated with Pure and Applied Math.
 - Stress teacher development through both pre-service and in-service strategies.
 - Consider strengthening curriculum supports.
- Coordinated Services for Children
 - Study ways to improve inter-agency administrative structures, processes and outcomes, including focusing on and sharing best practices where successes are reported.
- Improving Access to Information Technology
 - A more coordinated information technology strategy is needed to address divergent IT infrastructure support costs and economies of scale.
 - Improve information to school jurisdictions on the status of Supernet.
- Improving Public Satisfaction
 - Both Alberta Learning and school boards have identified the priority of improving public satisfaction. Consider partnering strategies to jointly pursue this priority with greater efficiency and effectiveness.
- Local School Board Priorities
 - Consider enhancing supports for literacy development for students in need of additional help, especially strategies targeting early childhood literacy readiness.
 - Support jurisdictional strategies to enhance teachers' professional development and growth.
 - Reference funding issues/implications of board priorities for the planned funding review.

RESULTS ACHIEVED AND IMPLICATIONS FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

AERRs were reviewed to assess the degree of compliance with reporting of required performance measures by school boards. The results of this analysis are reported in Table 8.

Table 8 – Inclusion of Required Performance Measures in AERRs

Results Measure	Percent 1997-1998 (n= 60)	Percent 1998-1999 (n= 60)	Percent 1999-2000 (n= 60)
1. Percentage of students who achieved acceptable standard/ standard of excellence on provincial achievement tests:			
• Based on those writing (5 years of data)	93%	90%	92%
• Based on cohort (5 years of data)	N/A	58%	70%
2. Percentage of students who achieved acceptable standard/ standard of excellence on diploma exams.	97%	88%	95%
3. Percentage of students who achieved jurisdiction targets on provincial achievement tests and diploma exams (explicitly stated).	N/A	67%	73%
4. Participation rates: percentage of students in grades 3, 6 and 9 who wrote provincial achievement tests and student participation in diploma courses:			
• Achievement tests	85%	98%	95%
• Diploma Exams	93%	92%	90%
5. Goal 2 – Required local measure(s).	95%	92%	98%
6. Goal 3 – Required local measure(s).	90%	72/55%	100%
7. Goal 4 – Required local measure(s).	93%	88%	97%
8. Goal 5 – Required local measure(s).	60-65%	88%	100%
9. Goal 7– Required local measure(s).	87-95%	83-98%	97%
10. Local measures for local goals reported on	42%	75%	68%

Conclusions

Responsiveness to the required performance measures has improved substantially, but would benefit from further review, especially the reporting of provincial achievement test results on the cohort basis.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROVINCIAL PLANNING AND REPORTING

School jurisdictions' AERRs were analyzed in both 1998-99 and 1999-2000 to determine what areas were most in need of improving. These sets of data are summarized and juxtaposed in Table 9 and are presented in detail in the sections that follow (Tables 10 through 15).

*Table 9 – Areas for Improvement: A Comparative Review
(1998-99 and 1999-00 AERRs)*

Area	1998-99 AERR (n= 43)			1999-00 AERR (n= 60)		
	n	%	RANK	n	%	RANK
Student achievement and evaluation	69	37.1	1	27	15.5	4
Curricular programs and technology	41	22.1	2	28	16.1	3
Community linkages	32	17.2	3	22	12.6	5
Staff	19	10.2	4	36	20.7	2
Funding	11	5.9	5	37	21.3	1
Facilities	8	4.3	6	5	2.9	7
Administration	6	3.2	7	19	10.9	6
Total	186	100		174	100	

FUNDING

Different aspects of funding were commented on by jurisdictions in 1999-00 (see also the additional analysis of budget implications reported on p. 23-24). Although the AERR reports mentioned the increased funding supports, these documents also reflected some insecurity among the jurisdictions with regard to funding concerns and over the required documentation. Jurisdictions also identified areas for improvement of education funding, with particular emphasis on suggesting issues of equity. These areas can be assembled into generalized themes outlined in Table 10.

Table 10- Funding Issues Outlined in 1999-00 AERRs

Issues	Sample Comments from Jurisdictions*
Need for Targeted Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alberta Learning needs to recognize the total cost of providing special programs and services. • Earmarked funding is needed by boards for initiatives such as student health, code 42 students, AISI, ELI, etc. • Levels of services have improved since 1993. These initiatives and funding (AISI) have to continue. • Need for secure, long term funding to support the initiatives that have been implemented under the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement and Early Literacy Initiative. • Alberta Learning needs to provide initiative funding for gifted and talented students. • Funding is needed to reduce class size/ More money is needed for PTR. • Continue funding for consortia. • Increase in scarcity and distance funding is needed. • Alberta Learning must revise funding framework for small schools. It is even more complicated for French Language students.
Need for Funding Flexibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It would be nice if targeted/ reactive funding were removed. This would provide for transfers to base funding and allow boards to make decisions that meet their local needs. • Targeted funding continues to limit the schools' ability to respond to students needs – limited usage. • Kill earmarked grants. The administrative overhead is a waste of funds. • AISI funding needs to be sustained but with flexibility to reallocate dollars within existing projects. • Require flexibility to reduce education-funding support for health services. • Any new funding model for outreach programs must have an override clause that will accommodate cases where typical does not fit.
Allocating Funds for Information Technology and Utilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • Extensive work (is needed) here (in the field of technology). Biggest implication is the cost associated with evergreening. • Provision needs to be made in technology funding for evergreening. • There is inequity in internet access because of narrow bandwidth in rural areas. Total cost of ownership needs to be explored. • • Provincial funding is needed to assist jurisdictions to make full use of wide bandwidth network.
Personnel Costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More money for teacher professional development is needed. • Timing of funding announcement is important for staffing purposes. Need next year funding announcement earlier in December or January so that staffing numbers can be determined. Other countries are hiring Alberta graduates in January. • Teachers' salaries need to be competitive and comparable to other professions and to other provinces and the U.S. The then announced 3% increase in funding to boards was not perceived as allowing boards to offer sufficient increases in salaries. • Additional funding is imperative to eliminate shortages of special staff, such as speech and occupational therapists.

Jurisdictions stressed the importance of how funding is structured, however, the opinions split on this matter. A proportion of suggestions were in favor of increased flexibility in funding. At the same time another, larger, group of propositions advocated for increased/ continual support of specific (earmarked) programs. This dichotomous opinion will be a key issue to be addressed in the funding framework review.

Funding for classroom technology development attracted much attention on the part of jurisdictions and therefore is worth being mentioned separately. Evergreening and the concerns about the costs of replacing technology were repeatedly expressed in AERR reports. ("Biggest implication is the cost associated with evergreening"). The jurisdictions also noted that "total cost of ownership" needs to be explored. Concerns were also stated around the inequity to Internet access because of narrow bandwidth in rural areas. (Note: Alberta's Supernet initiative will address the bandwidth issues).

Some jurisdictions mentioned the need to address high/ rising cost of utilities and insurance that takes money away from student programs. Personnel-related funding also was a significant issue in the AERR reports; other issues associated with staff professional development and welfare are highlighted in more detail in the next section.

STAFF

A large proportion of implications evolved around different areas of staff development and wellness, reflecting some overlap with fiscal issues. Table 9 demonstrates that staff-related issues were the second most frequently mentioned items. The need for continual professional development and enhancing different aspects of the latter was the most frequently mentioned item (roughly half of all statements) followed by the costs of salary increases and issues of staff recruitment and expanding of special staff (staff diversification) (Table 11). While some jurisdictions reported meeting their special staff needs (hiring needed specialists), others stated inability to do so.

Table 11 - Staff Issues Outlined in 1999-00 AERs

Issues	Sample Comments from Jurisdictions
Professional Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for continual professional development (for teachers and administrators) is a crucial factor in maintaining and improving student outcomes. • Teachers need to be trained and provided with in-service, instructional support and resources in order to address the special needs of students and have qualifications to teach specialty courses and use technology. • Teachers need to be trained and provided with in-service in the following key areas: information technology, math, ELI and successful implementation of new curricula (teachers and administrators). • Alberta Learning efforts in enhancing professional development are appreciated ("Division applauds AL in the development of Policy 2.1.5, Teacher Growth, Supervision and Evaluation").
Salary Increase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers' salaries need to be competitive and comparable to other professions and to other provinces and the U.S. • The 5% rollback of teacher salaries in the mid-nineties is still not perceived to have been returned to teachers in some jurisdictions.
Issues With Staff Recruitment and Retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some jurisdictions reported difficulties in recruiting teachers in secondary math, sciences and CTS. • Increasing staff turnover makes it more difficult to implement changes in education. • The issue of workload for teachers needs to be addressed (teacher wellness issue). • The Edmonton Public School Board SBDM model may work, but it demands a large-scale system. Smaller jurisdictions can't ensure enough demand year over year to maintain job security of program consultants. • Legislation regarding the Alberta Teachers Retirement Fund needs to be examined – a large talent pool of recently retired teachers is inaccessible because they would be penalized (pension implications). (Note: action has been recently been taken to address this issue.)
Promoting Teaching Career and Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We need to promote teaching career in conjunction with partners. For example, students need to be encouraged to take teaching as a career-joint initiative of CASS, ATA, ASBA, Alberta Learning (promotional programs of the good of being a teacher). • The province needs to provide the best possible teacher education and consider expanding teacher education programs into rural areas.
Staff Diversification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a need for additional specialized staff such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Speech and occupational therapists - Special Education teachers and coordinators - Counselors and program consultants - Support personnel in program planning, special needs assessment, literacy and technology

PROGRAM

Program-related matters were ranked third. Commentary was attributable to three main themes, those relating to implementation of new curriculum, programs that have been strengths for the jurisdiction or successes for students, and programs that represented challenges for implementation. These comments are summarized below for each category (Table 12).

Table 12 – Curricular Programs and Technology in 1999-00 AERRs

Issues	Sample Comments from Jurisdictions
Program Concerns/Threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Curriculum development process requires revision – suggest Alberta Learning establish an Advisory Committee with wide representation. Use PD consortium on a more regular basis to support curriculum implementation. Continue and increase support for implementation of new curricula. More work needed in Special Education. Special Education needs to be monitored for effectiveness in serving L.D. students. Widening array of educational choices may lead to fragmentation and long-term erosion of public education. Need continuing plan to provide education for information technology. Province needs to play stronger role in development of on-line curriculum. An integrated model of curriculum implementation will be the key to implementation of curriculum that involves integration of curriculum and instruction with technology. Maintaining program offerings in small high schools. Smaller high schools may only offer Pure Math and distance learning is not the appropriate form for Applied Math. Most regular high school principals don't think, "outside the box." They are focused on CEU production. Outreach schools, since they are non-traditional, will do better when they are located outside regular schools.
Program Strengths and Successes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outreach program success. ADLC is a real benefit to rural Alberta students. 96 programs are offered through Internet or program software Access to alternative programs or delivery modes; for example, Career High, Outreach, HOMEbase, Apprenticeship, Technical Preparation, IOP, Bridges, Year Round Schooling Parents help plan appropriate programs for students requiring IPP's Board cross-boundary busing policy enables students to access special programs All schools (in the jurisdiction) have a Curriculum and Instruction Supportive Framework Technology in-service is extensive. High satisfaction with technology although student satisfaction needs some action. All schools received Level 2 TLC in-service on Technology integration in 1999-2000 school year ICT Outcomes curriculum fully implemented during 99/2000 school year Tech Prep Program allows CTS credits to be carried into advanced courses at Red Deer and Olds Colleges
New Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acceptability of Applied Math 30 needs to be determined by Alberta Learning not post-secondary institutions. Must put in place strategies to improve access and participation in second languages learning.

STUDENTS

The data in Table 9 indicates that student-related implications were relatively less frequently mentioned items in the recent AERRs. (While being the first priority in 1998-99, student issues descend to the fourth place in 1999-00 AERRs). This decline in rank, however, is reflective of the fact that student related issues show up in other areas of the AERR. For instance, many jurisdictions stated among the “implications” the levels of and/or change in student satisfaction and achievement. Specific student-related issues mentioned by the jurisdictions can be grouped into the following major categories: accommodating varied needs of students, implications for planning and reporting and student evaluation and assessment, issues with rural/small schools, and the safe and caring schools initiative (Table 13).

Table 13 – Student Issues in 1999-00 AERRs

Issues	Sample Comments from Jurisdictions
Accommodating Varied Needs of Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a combination of approaches, such as expanding of alternative programs, teachers employing a variety of instructional methods and technology (i.e., Virtual School, Internet and program software) to meet “the unique and varied needs of students.” • Teachers need to incorporate a wide variety of assessment strategies and clearly communicate learning expectations to the students. • The issue of the high incidence of special needs students should be addressed. A growing concern was expressed by the jurisdictions for increasing number of high needs students, “particularly those with significant behavior disorders,” and the impact of such students in a regular classroom. • Special education needs to be monitored for effectiveness of serving L.D. students. • The issue of quality of and reporting on home education needs to be addressed. Some jurisdictions indicated difficulties in reporting and interpreting results on home education due to very low numbers of students. Since the majority of home ed. students do not write the provincial achievement tests, it is difficult to make judgments about the quality of the program relative to provincial standards. This entails quality and responsibility issues that are below acceptable accountability standards.
Implications for Planning and Reporting and Student Evaluation and Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The two-way reporting and information flow should be encouraged between the province and jurisdictions (“managing information needs/flow between AL and districts”). • Provincial statistics are needed by jurisdictions in areas such as high school completion (This data is now provided to jurisdictions by Alberta Learning). • Analysis of prior students’ performance by Learner Assessment Branch is useful to the School jurisdictions. Clarify whether IOP students will write the IOP test, the standard achievement test or both. • Useful experience (best practices) of jurisdictions in planning and reporting on students’ progress should be brought to light, shared and utilized. The examples involve schools doing a detailed analysis of the results and developing an improvement plan to improve student learning. It is important for the schools and jurisdictions to utilize a wealth of locally collected information for setting targets and strategies for improvement. (It is useful to set targets on what students are really achieving). • Analysis of the difference between school awarded and diploma marks is useful for reporting purposes. • Strongly support the retention of the grade 3 provincial achievement tests. However, the value of achievement testing should be considered. For example, testing at the grade 3 level encourages over emphasis on math and language.
Issues With Rural/ Small Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Because of low enrollment, small schools cannot offer the same selection of courses to their students. (The issue of choice in rural setting). • Small high schools are challenged to be financially viable.
Safe and Caring Schools Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue with the Safe and Caring initiatives. Schools continue Safe and Caring programs such as Bully Proofing, Lions Quest, Party Program, DARE Program, and Peer Mediation.

COMMUNITY

Ranked fifth, community related issues are important to school boards. The key themes, detailed below (Table 14) involve the central importance of the Alberta Children's' Initiative and improving communications with the public about the successes achieved by basic education. Communication with parents including their access to information and opportunities for involvement in their children's education, were put into a separate topic in Table 14.

Table 14 – Community Issues in 1999-00 AERRs

Issues	Sample Comments from Jurisdictions
Alberta's Children's Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to emphasize improved coordination. • Continue work with children's services. • Extensive local collaboration with agencies and other school jurisdictions. • Health authority amalgamations should be coterminous with school jurisdiction boundaries. • Each school has a key contact to coordinate services for special needs students and to work cooperatively with children service agencies • Several regional/ community authorities, boards and agencies work with the board to provide services and resources to students and parents for e.g. School/ Family Liaison, Early Intervention Coordinators • Schools continue Safe and Caring programs: Bully proofing, Lions Quest, Party Program, DARE Program, and Peer Mediation. • Staff served on variety of local committees and a partnership was developed between the RHA, Ribstone Child and Family Services and Alberta Mental Health, Participated in SHIP • Division involved with Family-School Wellness, Student Health Initiatives, Student Health Outreach, Service Neighborhood Placement Management Board, and Aboriginal Frontline Project.
Public Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Province needs to publicize more achievement testing information to media. Assessment Branch needs to have subsets within acceptable standards and standards of excellence. • Alberta Learning should play a more visible role in promoting education and student achievement. • Emphasize the positive aspects of education. • A condensed version of the AERR is used with the parents. Parents need to know the present year to avoid confusion. The package that goes out to parents has some present information and past years results. • Indication of other work being done by the Board that may be relevant to Alberta Learning: Several initiatives to improve image and relationships are underway. The Board offers examples of growth in community partnerships and celebrations of achievements, awards and staff recognition; and contributions of the jurisdiction to regional and national scene are recorded. • When communicating with parents, Alberta Learning must support what District is trying to do with the resources provided by government. • Parents don't care about cohort reporting. They want results of those who wrote.
Communication with parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents don't know enough about school councils. • Parents help plan appropriate programs for students requiring IPP's • Facilitating parent/ student choice of programs. • Providing more programming options to parents

ADMINISTRATION

Administration-related issues outlined in the 1999-00 AERRs concerned the following areas: home education, student health initiative and various aspects of accountability relationships (Table 15).

Table 15 – Administration Issues in 1999-00 AERRs

Issues	Sample Comments from Jurisdictions
Accountability relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include room to record priority results and intended future action. • Appreciated information for next plan - goals and outcome required. • Too many requirements of Alberta Learning for statistical information. Province should collect some of its own information. • The ministry should revise the dates of plans submission and ministry reports. • Managing information needs/flow between AL and districts. • The board is not supportive of inter-jurisdictional competition. • Accountability timelines are too short. • Could we develop “templates” for schools to follow the planning process in consultation with jurisdictions? • PD Consortium advertises directly to schools, we need more jurisdiction coordination.
Home Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students on home education. Very few and difficult to interpret results • Small number of students on home education. • Home education is almost a non-issue – most students have gone to rural schools • Have less than 20 home education students – less than 5 per grade. Do not know of students on home education with other school jurisdictions. Other school jurisdictions should be required to report to the resident school jurisdiction. • Re home education: Need the % of students who achieved targets for PATs & DIP Exams.
Students’ Health Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data already provided in Student Health Initiative reports. Consider coordination of reporting. • Student Health Initiative best practices need to be identified. • Administrative work with Student Health Initiative is extensive.

CONCLUSIONS

The fall of 2000 highlighted a variety of implications for Alberta Learning’s planning process. Funding comments are associated with on-going searching for the optimal model of funding for basic education, the costs of maintaining and supporting (evergreening) information technology and increasing personnel cost pressures relating to salary levels and staff development.

Staffing and funding issues are inexorably intertwined, however, teacher salaries are presented in the AERRs as a minor issue in relationship to the broader area of staff comments. Professional development, specialized staff shortages, recruitment and retention and attracting new entrants to the field are all human resource development issues that were articulated with the bigger picture of staff satisfaction.

The program picture that emerges from the AERRs is represented by a two-sided coin. On one side are program strengths, and on the other challenges facing the basic education system. The strengths ironically reflect the challenges. Outreach programs and progress made by some jurisdictions with alternative programs are offset by calls for more effective outreach program models and greater program flexibility for students. Successes achieved with technology and ICT curriculum are offset by calls for “evergreening” technology infrastructure and more supports from Alberta Learning for leadership in on-line curriculum and long-range information technology planning. Lastly, successes with existing curriculum are offset by calls for new models of curriculum development and creative

supports for implementing new curriculum. The program image you see depends largely on what side of the coin you are looking at.

Student issues included increased availability of flexible programs to meet the varied learning needs of students. Also, student assessment and evaluation is identified as an area where improved communication and interpretation of student assessment data is needed; this area has historically received insufficient attention. The issue of small rural schools ability to respond to student needs also is not a new issue, but the field is still working to find the right mix of technological, staff and fiscal supports to make small rural schools work optimally for students. Successes for students include the Alberta Distance Learning Centre, Safe and Caring Schools initiatives and, with the qualification noted above, the provincial achievement tests and diploma exams.

Communications with parents and taxpayers represents a vital component of community linkages reflected in the AERRs. Suggestions are made for improved alignment between Alberta Learning's public communications and the needs of school jurisdictions around such issues as achievement test results and general public relations strategies supportive of basic education. Timing issues around AERR development are also a concern relative to optimal communications regarding accountability. The other primary community linkages issue involves the Alberta's Children's Initiative which is a key link between jurisdictions and community supports.

Administrative issues focused on accountability relationships between the Ministry and school jurisdictions and reflected both appreciation for improved information on planning requirements as well as a number of specific concerns regarding timing and the need for more optimal measures that better meet the needs of both jurisdictions and Alberta Learning. Comments regarding home education reflect the need for a more efficient reporting process for this group of students.. Lastly, as noted in relationship to feedback on the priority of coordinated services to children, some jurisdictions identify the need for more efficient reporting and administrative procedures for the student's health initiative.

PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENT OF SPECIFIC GROUPS OF STUDENTS

Alberta Learning funds several student-focused initiatives regarding early literacy, English as a second language and special education. Subsequently, school jurisdictions have been required to report in their AERRs on results achieved for these specific groups of students. Table 16 presents a summary of these reporting requirements.

Table 16 – Data on Specific Groups of Students from the 1999-2000 AERRs (n = 60)

Program	Required Local Measures (%)	Implications for Planning	N	Rank
Early Literacy	65%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that funding and other support is available on a continuous basis. 	12	1
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand the initiative (i.e., pick up children at early age and extend program coverage into grades 3 and 4). 	3	2
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on teacher and resource development 	1	3
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on development of a protocol for assessment 	1	3
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuous funding from AL should be combined with more flexibility (for schools/jurisdictions) 	1	3
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with community/ family literacy to develop literacy skills (parent workshops and AISI would help) 	1	3
ESL	55%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very few students/ not many needs (to implement the program) 	5+	1
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuous funding to meet the needs of ESL students 	3	2
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provincial ESL achievement figures would be helpful (for comparisons) 	1	3
Special Needs	85%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain/ increase special needs funding. Removing the funding cap is considered to be a good idea. 	5	1
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow/ implement the Special Education Review report recommendations. 	3	2
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hire/ train staff specifically for rendering Special Needs services. 	3	2
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report separate results on Special Needs students not writing the achievement tests (e.g., report on IPP goals, measure IOP achievement provincially, etc.) 	3	2
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Place emphasis on addressing the needs of talented and gifted students and IOP students including higher grades (grades 7 and 8). 	2	3
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Place emphasis on coordinated service delivery, (salary) increase for teachers. 	1	4

Overall, the AERRs demonstrated a fairly high degree of compliance with the local outcome measure requirements. Eighty-five per cent of the jurisdictions reported on local measures for special needs and 65% reported on the progress with the early literacy program. A relatively low reporting rate (55%) on ESL can be attributed to a relatively low degree of its implementation, given that in some cases the number of eligible students within a jurisdiction is low. Out of a variety of exemplary measures listed in the AERRs the most noteworthy measures are presented in Table 17.

Table 17 – Exemplary Measures for Programs Covering Specific Groups of Students

Programs	Exemplary Measures
ELI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of students in early literacy programs reading and writing at their expected grade level (meet acceptable standard for their grade level) at the end of the school year • Increase (%) in students' literacy skills (this measure is useful for assessing progress/ trends in results achieved and juxtaposing results with the planned targets) • Proportion of students who successfully exited from the early literacy program during the year
ESL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of ESL students who are reading and writing at grade level/ achieve acceptable standards compared to the province at the end of the school year • % of students increasing by a category level on their IPP
Special Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Various satisfaction measures

Unlike Early Literacy and ESL measures, exemplary measures related to the Special Needs program evolved mainly around the issue of parent satisfaction. It seems that some measures used by jurisdictions to assess the first two programs could be also pertinent for reporting on special needs students.

As far as implications for provincial planning are concerned, maintaining and/or increasing funding for the programs was the most frequently mentioned issue (Table 16).

FINANCIAL SUMMARY

Spending per student per year expressed for total spending and operational spending was required in the 1999-2000 AERRs. This data was summarized in a table format and missing or erroneous data was noted in 13 cases for total spending and 27 cases for operational spending. **Total Spending** means, "...total expenditures for the year (AFS Schedule 1) divided by total FTE enrollment."

Operational Spending means, "total expenses for the year (AFS Schedule 1) minus amortization of capital assets and interest on capital debt and divided by total FTE enrollment." This data represents key financial indicators for the public and it is important that it be represented accurately and consistently in the AERRs.

Jurisdiction administrators were also asked to identify any implications premised on the operational budget breakdown in relationship to total spending. There was a diverse range of cost pressure issues identified by 36 jurisdictions. These points are summarized by frequency in Table 18.

Table 18 – Funding Cost Pressures - Reported by Jurisdictions

Sparcity and declining enrollments	12
Operations and Maintenance	7
Technology "evergreening"	6
Need for greater budget flexibility	5
Pupil-teacher ratios	5
Staff costs and P D costs	5
Transportation	5
Special education	4
Increasing enrollment	4
Positive statements about budget supports	3
Capital costs carried by the board	3
Density issues	1
Francophone program costs	1
One time grant expectations	1
Total - cost pressures/Number of boards identifying cost pressures	57/36

Conclusions

As noted above, the analysis of financial data concluded that missing data, and in a smaller number of instances inaccurate data, is evident in this reporting category. School board AERRs are important public documents and therefore, it is imperative that Field Services and school jurisdiction staff work to ensure the financial summary data required in AERRs accurately reflects the data that is reported in the school board's audited financial statement. Those school boards that have reported this information accurately and in relationship to *Guide* requirements should be positively acknowledged for fulfilling this key reporting function.

KEY THEMES

1. The five provincial priorities for basic education continue to focus attention on critical areas for improving the overall quality of learning for Alberta students. The five priority areas represent complex, systemic challenges, and while some progress clearly is being achieved in each of the areas, a careful and complete review of the priority areas within Alberta Learning's planning process and business plan would be timely to ensure optimal strategies are being formulated in the most appropriate areas.
2. Emerging board priorities include literacy development for students and teachers' professional development and growth. Staff development was also ranked the number 2 area for improvement by school boards. Alberta Learning should consider how these emerging board priorities can be addressed in the Ministry's future Business Plans.
3. Comments on funding suggest the absence of systemic factors and the presence of idiosyncratic or highly contextual factors influencing jurisdiction-level perceptions of funding issues. Alberta Learning should consider in its Review Committee on Outcomes and the review of the funding framework for basic education, the issues identified by school boards. The Ministry may also want to explore ways to better link provincial decisions about funding programs and levels to a set of input, process and outcome measures. The province may also want to seek ways to better communicate education funding information both to school boards and the general public.
4. Meeting student needs is fundamental to education planning processes. Key areas of student needs requiring concentrated attention include: increasing program flexibility; improving communications around student evaluation and assessment issues, including optimal models for cohort reporting; and, providing additional program or financial support for small schools.
5. Program implementation is one of the more challenging areas for school boards. It is at one and the same time a story of successes and challenges. Alberta Learning's business planning process may need to consider the curricular program issues identified in this analysis in future business plans.

6. The ASBA on June 19, 2001 released the results of a public consultation process, among the conclusions, were, "that school boards undertake to inform their communities of the many positive things that are being accomplished in schools." The parallelism between this conclusion and the provincial priority of improving public satisfaction is striking and supports the notion of a collaborative approach to public relations.
7. Reporting on the progress and achievement of specific groups of students including those served by ELI projects, ESL programs and Special Education programs continues to present a challenge for the system. As Alberta Learning engages in implementing the recommendations of the Special Education Review and considers redesign of its Student Information System ways to improve the reporting on the academic achievement of these groups of students should be considered.
8. Where necessary, Field Services should continue to work closely with school jurisdiction staff to ensure the AERR accurately presents financial summary data.

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